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SUBJECT: Parliamentary Campaigns Begin In Serbia

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D) BELGRADE 1590

11. (SBU) Summary: Serbian parliamentary elections are scheduled for January 21, 2007. Parties have come out swinging: aggressively working on their party lists and possible coalitions and launching their opening salvos for campaign themes. Kosovo is the predictable headline but there are democratic parties pushing hard on economic and quality of life themes as well. End Summary

12. (SBU) With the announcement of January 21 parliamentary elections, Serbian political parties have wasted no time beginning their campaigns and jockeying for pre-election coalitions. The Democratic Party (DS) has already turned in its official electoral list -- in order to be listed first on the ballot -- that reflects deals with several smaller parties, including Rasim Ljajic's Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP), and is well stocked with women and minorities. Its small but progressive and aggressive offshoot, the LDP has lined up with several small but progressive democratic parties including the Civic Alliance (GSS) the Social Democratic Union (SDU) and the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV). The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) is lining up with a collection of rural populist nationalists, while the G17 plus continues to insist that it will run alone, rejecting feelers from Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Party (SPO) for a "technical alliance" that would get them both over the five percent threshold. Minority parties in Vojvodina, the Sandzak and southern Serbia continue to mold their strategies for the election.

Election Commission Announces Regulations for Lists  
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13. (SBU) The Republic Election Commission (RIK) set January 5 as the deadline for submitting party lists of deputy candidates with a required 10,000 certified signatures of voters. RIK will officially announce each party's polling list by January 10 and the final number of voters on January 19. In a controversial move, the RIK defied the Law on the Election of Parliamentary Deputies and announced that minority parties and minority coalitions only need 3,000 certified signatures to submit their polling lists.

DS Kicks Off the Campaign  
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14. (SBU) The DS, led by President Tadic, is focusing its campaign message on fighting poverty, improving the lives of Serbian citizens, and moving Serbia closer to integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions. Tadic is personally raising the stakes, announcing that he will pick

a suitable Prime Minister from the ranks of the DS. Press is speculating that among the possible candidates are Ivan Vujacic, current Serbian Ambassador to the United States, and former ministers in the Djindjic government Gordana Matkovic (social services and welfare) and Bozidar Djelic (finance). However, Tadic will likely hold to his agreement with Kostunica to allow the DSS to retain the premiership. The parliamentary list for the DS is topped by Ruzica Djindjic, the widow of former Prime Minister, and also includes the original founder of DS Micunovic, all the five DS vice-presidents as well as other former prominent DS ministers in the Djindjic cabinet.

#### LDP+ Looking to Make Threshold

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15. (SBU) The LDP+ coalition, including the LSV, GSS and SDU, is planning a rally on November 18 to officially kick off their campaign. During a press conference on November 11, Cedomir Jovanovic, head of the LDP, began laying the groundwork of the campaign by accusing Kostunica of following a policy of March 12, 2003--the day former Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated--and promising that the LDP+ would instead follow the policy of October 5, 2000, the day Milosevic was ousted from power. The LDP+, as the democratic alternative, appears to be banking on the discontent over the referendum and the constitution, and the boycott that many members see as positive proof that many Serbs are unhappy with the democratic forces. Our sources tell us that internal polls done by the DS have confirmed Tadic's worst fear, that the LDP+ has already reached or broken the five percent threshold.

#### G17 Plus Goes It Alone

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16. (SBU) G17 Plus President Mladjan Dinkic announced on Monday that his party will not enter into any pre-election coalition, but will participate in the elections independently. Their pre-election platform will include strengthening the economy, increasing the number of jobs, working towards candidacy in the EU and fighting against radical chauvinism and corruption. Dinkic has expressed hope that the G17 Plus can maintain their presence in parliament after the elections and be an "essential part" of the democratic bloc. Despite this positive kickoff, the G17 Plus is taking a huge gamble by going it alone. The G17 Plus has been close to threshold in recent polls, but could end up being just short the necessary votes to enter parliament in January.

#### DSS: Kosovo and the Constitution

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17. (SBU) The DSS, headed by Prime Minister Kostunica, is running on its success of bringing a new constitution into force--a key promise of the Kostunica government--and protecting the territorial integrity of Serbia with Kosovo as its integral part. The DSS announced that it would base its campaign on a policy of democratic reform and the preservation of state unity, i.e. Kosovo, probably in an effort to exploit the issue and increase turnout for their party. In an expected move, the DSS chose Kostunica as their candidate for the premiership. For now, it appears as though the DSS will confirm a pre-election coalition with several populist and nationalist rural parties including Velimir Illic's New Serbia (NS); the United Serbia Party (JS), a remnant of the Party of Serbia Unity headed by notorious and now deceased paramilitary leader Arkan; and the Serbian Democratic Renewal Movement (SDPO), the renegade offshoot of Draskovic's SPO. Minority leaders Jozsef Kasza and his Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM) and Sulejman Ugljanin and his List for Sandzak will likely run independently in the election, but our sources tell us

that they will both receive campaign support including finances from the DSS and will likely align with Kostunica after the election.

#### SPO: Looking for a Coalition Partner

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¶18. (SBU) The SPO, led by Vuk Draskovic, appears to be preparing to run independently in the campaign, but is also continuing discussions with a number of possible coalition partners, including the G17 plus. Our sources tell us that there have been some meetings with Covic's Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the DSS, but the SPO has rejected these possibilities.

#### Minorities Shaping Strategies for the Election

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¶19. (SBU) The Sandzak is poised to be volatile ground during the campaign and both the DS and DSS are reaching out to interlocutors in the predominately Muslim region. A recent bomb attack against Democratic Action Party (SDA) Activist Mahmut Hajrovic and his wife is yet another example of the continuing political violence between rivals Sulejman Ugljanin, head of the SDA and Rasim Ljajic, head of the Sandzak Democratic Party and now with his minority allies on the DS list (see below). The recent violence in Sandzak and Ugljanin's ruthless effort to consolidate his power in Novi Pazar promises to make the Sandzak a simmering hotspot on the campaign trail.

¶10. (SBU) Ljajic's deal with the DS helped insulate him from any of the fall-out from his home turf struggle with Ugljanin. He is tenth on the DS list and obtained three additional guaranteed MP slots with another possible four depending on the overall DS results. Ugljanin will run independently but with strong DSS support.

¶11. (SBU) Riza Halimi's Party for Democratic Action (PVD), a moderate Albanian party in southern Serbia, meanwhile, is in favor of participating in the election, but will formally decide after consulting with and forming a coalition with all other Albanian political parties. Halimi may fall short of the natural threshold (turnout divided by the 250 seats in the parliament, i.e., 13-15,000 votes) if he participates alone which would leave his party both out of parliament and out of favor with his co-ethnics in southern Serbia and Kosovo.

#### SPS and SRS: Party Congress and Unclear Leadership

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¶12. (SBU) Because of its upcoming party congress in December, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) has yet to announce possible names on its ticket or what its messages will be to the public during the campaign. The party congress could prove divisive for the SPS as the party struggles to chose a new leader after the void left by the death of Milosevic in March. The SRS, meanwhile, remains distracted by the trial of their formal leader, Vojislav Seselj, in the Hague and his continuing hunger strike in protest of what he perceives as unfair treatment. The Radicals announced that they will fight against crime and corruption and work on modernizing Serbia in addition to its constant nationalist drum beating on the Kosovo issue.

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Comment  
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¶13. (SBU) With campaign season in high gear, it will be difficult for the parties to focus on little but the impending parliamentary election. Ahtisaari's decision to postpone a decision on Kosovo and its prominence as a

campaign theme for the DSS as well as the Radicals and Socialist, will ensure that Kosovo stays center stage all during the short campaign season. We will continue to move forward with our GOTV campaign and democratic roundtables throughout the country to both support the democratic bloc in this crucial campaign and encourage high voter participation. The election will surely be instrumental in the tone for the Kosovo end-game when it continues after voters cast their ballots on January 21. It may also be a crucial moment in Serbia's democratic transition pitting nationalist themes against hopes for a Euro-Atlantic future. End Comment  
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